

Colossians in One and a Half Lessons - Part B

(Overview of Paul's Letter to the Colossians)

I. Background for This Lesson

- a. From time to time we have been adding to a series of lessons where we teach an entire book of the Bible in a single message. The goal is to give an overview and develop the main point of the book or letter, rather than going into all the details. Thus far, we have done **Romans**, **Hebrews** and **Philemon**.
- b. Recently we have been in an expository teaching series going through **Leviticus**. The passage in **Colossians 2:16-17** has been a key to helping us understand the significance of the Law of Moses for us today.
 - i. "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (**Colossians 2:16-17**, NKJV)
 - ii. This indicates that the things in the Law of Moses were "shadows of things to come". Now that we have the substance or realities, we are no longer bound to hold to the shadows.
 - iii. However, seeing the shadows set forth centuries before can *strengthen our faith* and give us a *deeper understanding* of the realities we have now received through Christ.
- c. I assumed that since we were able to do **Hebrews** and **Romans** in a single-lesson format, it would not be hard to handle **Colossians** (which has only four chapters) in the same manner.
 - i. Furthermore, we covered most of the background material regarding Colosse in a recent lesson on **Philemon**.
 - ii. Also, we discussed the reference to the Colossians being (already) in the kingdom of God (**Colossians 1:13**) in another recent topical lesson on 'The Kingdom and the Church' (given 12/5/2021).
- d. However, in the course of teaching the prior lesson on **Colossians**, we ended up going fairly deep in our study of **Colossians chapter 2** but did not have time to adequately address some very important things in **Colossians 3-4**.
 - i. Therefore, we decided to expand on the foundation of the prior lesson and rename this two-lesson series 'Colossians in *One and a Half* Lessons'.

- e. Review from main points we covered in the prior lesson on **Colossians**.
 - i. Paul was writing this letter to a predominantly Gentile church, but to a group of mixed social backgrounds (husbands, wives, children, servants/slaves, slave-owners).
 - ii. He is concerned about two doctrine-related problems. False teachers are coming “with persuasive words”. (**Colossians 2:4**)
 - 1. False teachers telling people that they need to go back to following parts of the Law of Moses (**Colossians 2:8-17, 2:20-23**). This may be similar to the situation Paul addressed in **Galatians**.
 - 2. Someone was advocating “the worship of angels”. (**Colossians 2:18-19**)
 - iii. The case made by Paul in addressing those challenges included:
 - 1. Christ is divine; all the fullness of the Father rests in Him. We have been reconciled to God through Him. All *things in heaven* and on earth, visible and *invisible* (obviously, including the *angels*) were created through and for Him. (**Colossians 1:13-20**)
 - 2. We don’t need to go back to circumcision and follow the Law of Moses. Circumcision and the Law were shadows of things to come. We now have the substance, the realities, through Christ. (**Colossians 2:16-17**)
 - a. We have been circumcised by the circumcision of Christ, being “buried with Him in baptism”. (**Colossians 2:12**)
 - i. In the prior lesson, we explained the significance of this statement and how it relates to baptism.
 - b. The requirements of the Law of Moses have been “taken out of the way” and “nailed to the cross” by Jesus. (**Colossians 2:14**)
 - iv. Paul ties our spiritual condition to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He says we have been “*buried with Him* in baptism, in which you also were *raised with Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (**Colossians 2:12**, NKJV)
 - 1. According to Paul, the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

2. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to *you the gospel which I preached to you*, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:
 - a. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and
 - b. that He was buried, and
 - c. that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,” (**1 Corinthians 15:1–4**, NKJV)
3. Paul explains in **Colossians** that just as Christ died, was buried and was raised (first from the grave, then to the right hand of God) ...
 - a. We also died and were buried *with Him*, in baptism
 - b. And *if we die and are buried with Him*, we will be raised with Him.

II. What is the Gospel Message of Salvation?

- a. Paul said that the gospel message is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
 - i. **Question:** What is the ‘good news’ for us?
 1. **Popular Modern View:** Many summarize the gospel as “Jesus died for your sins, so that you don’t have to die.”
 - a. The idea here is that Jesus paid the price for us. Salvation is (to us) a free gift that He paid for; we just have to *accept it*.
 2. **In Reality, Paul’s Message:** “Jesus died for your sins and was raised up. *If you are willing to die with Him*, you will be raised with Him.
 - a. We see this message throughout **Colossians 2-3**.
 - b. “This is a faithful saying: For *if we died with Him*, We shall also live with Him.” (**2 Timothy 2:11**, NKJV)
 - i. This is one of the most simple, powerful summaries of the “good news” of the gospel. It is

centered in what Jesus did, but also calls us to die with Him.

- ii. This is a great starting place for discussions with other believers regarding the essence of the gospel, before getting into specific doctrinal issues (such as baptism or eternal security).
- b. It seems to me that Jesus implied the same thing (that *we* must die) in **John 12**. There He speaks first regarding *His own* death. Then He speaks of those who would follow Him: that *they must lose their lives as well*.
 - i. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (**John 12:24–25**, NKJV)
- c. This also is what Paul said in an extended discussion at the beginning of **Romans 6**.
 - i. Read **Romans 6:1-14**.
 - ii. Paul begins his argument (that we must die to sin) by pointing the Christians in the Roman church back to their baptism, where they died with Christ.
 - iii. “For *if we have been united together in the likeness of His death*, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,” (**Romans 6:5**, NKJV)
 - iv. “Now *if we died with Christ*, we believe that we shall also live with Him,” (**Romans 6:8**, NKJV)
 - v. In **Romans 6**, Paul speaks of two aspects of this “dying with Christ”:
 - 1. We were buried with Christ and participated in the likeness of his death, *in baptism*.
 - 2. We have died to sin, and therefore can no longer let sin rule over us.
 - a. The statement in **Romans 6:23**, “the wages of sin is death”, is a *warning to Christians*, to those who have died with Christ and been liberated from sin.
 - b. This statement is written to people who *are already* Christians. It is a warning for them, that they *must not go back to sin* (or they will die spiritually).

3. Later in this letter, in the parable of the olive tree in **Romans 11**, Paul explains that the Christians can lose their salvation if they do not remain faithful to Christ. There will be dire consequences if we do not remain dead to sin.
 - a. “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.” (**Romans 11:19–22**, NKJV)

III. You Died with Christ

- a. Read **Colossians 2:20-3:17**.
 - i. We died with Christ, to the “basic principles of the world” including the Law of Moses “do not taste, do not handle” rules. (**Colossians 2:20-23**)
 - ii. We died, and our life is “*hidden with Christ* in God”. (**Colossians 2:3**)
 - iii. If we were raised with Christ, we must set our minds where He is (at the right hand of God), not on earthly things.
 1. **Questions / Challenges:** What are your thoughts consumed with? What are the greatest things that occupy your mind? What things to you worry about?
 - a. Are the things that consume your mind the things of heaven, or the things of this world?
- b. Paul calls the Christians higher with three successive, related challenges. Each challenge takes it higher than the previous one. All are based on the fact that they died with Christ and have been raised to where Christ is now: sitting at the right hand of God. (**Colossians 3:1-4**)
 - i. This is a great time to take inventory of your life. Consider each of the three sets of challenges that Paul addresses here.
 - ii. The three successive levels of challenges are:
 1. First-level challenge. *Put to death* the gross sins of the flesh, including fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and covetousness, which Paul says is idolatry. (**Colossians 3:5-7**)

- a. Reflect on this area your life and confess to a trusted brother or sister if you have been struggling with any of these sins.
 - i. This includes internet pornography and lust.
 - ii. Also, are you coveting what others have, *a sin which Paul equates to idolatry?*
2. Second-level challenge. *Put off* other sins of the flesh, including anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language and lying to one another. (**Colossians 3:8-11**)
 - a. For many mature Christians, these are the battleground areas.
 - b. These things come out in our closest relationships (husbands/wives, siblings, children/parents).
 - c. Don't make excuses. Deal with *your own life* before God. Each of us is called to put these things to death, regardless of what anyone else does or does not do.
 - i. As Jesus said: "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye." (**Luke 6:41-42**, NKJV)
3. Third-level challenge. *Put on* the following: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering. Bear with one another. Forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you. Plus, *above all these things put on love*, which is the bond of perfection. (**Colossians 3:12-14**)
 - a. Here, Paul is calling us to put on *the character of Christ*.
 - b. I find this third level to be *the most challenging* to my flesh, at this point in my life! I have been deeply convicted in this area.
 - c. Many married couples struggle with conflict in marriage. The best marriage counseling I can think of is

for one person to take a good look at their own life and character in light of what Paul says here regarding dying with Christ and being raised with Him. Paul makes it extremely practical!

d. Read **James 1:19-27**.

- i. Look in the mirror at your own life in light of what the Word of God says. Then do what it says, and repent!
- ii. Be humble and swift to listen.
- iii. Keep a tight rein on your tongue, or your religion is *useless*!

c. Read **Colossians 3:18-4:1**.

- i. Paul describes the Christian life not as a self-improvement course, but as a matter of putting our old life to death and putting on a new way of life.
- ii. The specific instructions that follow (to wives, husbands, children, servants and masters) are simply applying those principles.
 1. The concept that we will be treated by the Lord in the same way we treat others is applied here. We find this simple principle throughout the Scriptures.
 - a. “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (**Matthew 7:2**, NKJV)
 - b. “And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.” (**Matthew 6:12**, NKJV)
 - c. “Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” (**Colossians 4:1**, NKJV)
 2. Every Christian, in whatever station of life they find themselves, is called to die and be buried with Christ (initially in baptism, and thereafter through an ongoing life of repentance); and thereafter to put on the character of Christ.
 3. The calls to love, submission and obedience are all within the understanding that as Christians, we need to die to the passions and selfishness of our old life, and follow the

example of Christ. This has nothing to do with how well we are treated by others.

IV. On Prayer and Thanksgiving

a. Read **Colossians 4:2-13**.

- i. “Continue *earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving*; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” (**Colossians 4:2-4**, NKJV)
- ii. Paul closes with an appeal for prayers on his behalf.
 1. **Question:** For what specific things does Paul ask others to pray for him?
 2. He is aware of the spiritual battle, as shown by his closing request to the **Ephesians**.
 - a. “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*” (**Ephesians 6:17-20**, NKJV)
 3. Paul requested prayers for boldness and for open doors to spread the gospel.
 - a. Even while in prison, his great desire was to spread the gospel to others!
 - b. His request for prayers reflects his heart to seek and save the lost.
- iii. **Question / Challenge:** When you ask others for prayers on your behalf, what do you typically ask others to pray for?
- iv. Paul also holds up the example of Epaphras as a great, passionate prayer warrior.
 1. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, *always laboring fervently for you in prayers*, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear

him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” (**Colossians 4:12-13**, NKJV)

- a. In **Philemon v. 23**, Paul referred to Epaphras as a “fellow prisoner for Christ Jesus”.
- b. In the ESV, it says that Epaphras is “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers”. In the NIV, it says, “he is always wrestling in prayer for you.”
 - i. Clearly, Paul knew Epaphras prayed with intensity, passion and perseverance for the church in Colosse as well as in the neighboring towns of that region.
 - ii. “... The *effective, fervent prayer* of a righteous man avails much.” (**James 5:16**, NKJV)

V. Summary and Conclusions

- a. In this letter, Paul reminds us that we have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him.
- b. The consequences of that (our spiritual death and rebirth) include:
 - i. God’s people are no longer bound by the Law of Moses. It was nailed to the cross and taken away.
 1. The Law provided a foreshadowing of things to come. Now the substance of those things has arrived, through Christ.
 - ii. We died to sin, and our life is now to be hidden in that of Christ.
 1. Therefore, because we died, we must put off the gross sins of the flesh (fornication, passions, covetousness, etc.).
 2. For the same reason, we also must put off the other sins of the flesh, such as anger, wrath, malice and lying to others.
 3. Furthermore, setting our minds to where Christ is (seated at the right hand of the Father), we must put on the character of Christ, as well: tender mercies, kindness, bearing with one another, and forgiving others as Christ forgave us.
 - iii. And over all these things, we are called to put on love, which is “the bond of perfection”.

1. As Paul said in **2 Corinthians**: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then *all died*; and He died for all, that *those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*” (**2 Corinthians 5:14–15**, NKJV)